United Nations A/55/70–S/2000/364

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
1 May 2000

Original: English

General Assembly
Fifty-fifth session
Items 27, 30, 50, 74 and 75 of the preliminary list*

Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity

Implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, including measures and recommendations agreed upon at its mid-term review

Causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa

General and complete disarmament

Review and implementation of the Concluding Document of the Twelfth Special Session of the General Assembly

Security Council
Fifty-fifth year

Letter dated 25 April 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the chairman's summary report on the International Symposium on the Roles of Subregional and Non-Governmental Organizations in Conflict Prevention and Peace Initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa (see annex), which was held on 28 and 29 March 2000 in Tokyo under the joint sponsorship of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Institute for International Policy Studies.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under items 27, 30, 50, 74 and 75 of the preliminary list, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Yukio **Satoh**
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations

* A/55/50.

00-41214 (E) 170500

Annex to the letter dated 25 April 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

International Symposium on the Roles of Subregional and Non-Governmental Organizations in Conflict Prevention and Peace Initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa (Tokyo, 28 and 29 March 2000)

Chairman's summary report

The International Symposium on the Roles of Subregional and Non-Governmental Organizations in Conflict Prevention and Peace Initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa was held on 28 and 29 March 2000 in Tokyo. This symposium was co-sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Institute for International Policy Studies, and supported by the Asahi Shimbun. The following document is the chairman's summary report of views exchanged during the symposium between the participating panellists.

1. Current awareness (conflicts in Africa recognized as matters of serious international concern)

1. Conflicts in Africa stem from a complex intermingling of causal factors. Those causes are represented, for example, by the arbitrary demarcation of borders, poverty, conflicts among different ethnic groups (and difficulties in coexistence), lack of good governance, and disputes over the concession of scarce natural resources. It is not an overstatement to say that the situation in Africa is being further aggravated. Such a serious situation in Africa is characterized by a vicious cycle in which a ceasefire between conflicting parties leads repeatedly to the recurrence of conflict, as well as the outbreak of new conflicts. This is a matter of serious concern and urgency for the international community. There has also been concern expressed by participants from Africa that Africa may further lag behind the rest of the world unless appropriate action is taken.

2. In recent years, regional organizations, subregional organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been playing increasingly significant roles in conflict prevention and resolution, besides some important roles played by individual States and the United Nations.

3. With respect to the recent approach to conflict prevention and resolution, concepts such as the creation of a culture of peace have increasingly gained importance as the basis of thought. There is a recognition of the increasing importance of the "comprehensive approach" as a concrete response to conflict, in which various actors cooperate in different phases of conflict, utilizing a variety of measures (including not simply diplomatic measures, but economic assistance, security arrangements, humanitarian relief activities, assistance to democratization, and so on).

2. Need for cooperation and collaboration among a variety of actors

1. Effective conflict prevention and resolution can be pursued through active cooperation and collaboration among a variety of actors such as the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), subregional organizations, NGOs, and donors. In other words, conflict prevention and resolution can be expressed as the collaborative and cooperative efforts by all actors concerned. Conflict prevention and resolution would be more effective and efficient when these actors work in closer cooperation in a manner in which respective actors complement each other. For this purpose, participants shared the view that a kind of standard of conduct for respective actors should be clarified and their actions should comply with international law, especially with the Charter of the United Nations. A consensus was reached that the United Nations, specifically the Security Council, should play a central role in conflict prevention and resolution. Participants raised the point, however, that further discussion would be required to determine who would play the role of coordinator in charge of assigning respective roles for actors and how such an assignment would be carried out. Participants noted that the coordinator responsible for assigning roles may differ in accordance with various conflict situations.

2. Sharing the view that research institutes can make their intellectual contributions to conflict prevention and resolution, it was acknowledged among participants that there is a need for the publication of research findings, exchange between subregional

organizations and research institutes, promotion of networking among those institutes, and confirmation of the necessity of support given to institutes by the international community.

3. The necessity of the increased participation by women in conflict prevention and resolution was emphasized.

3. Efforts made by subregional organizations to enhance their capacities and concrete measures for improvements

1. It was the evaluation of the participants that subregional organizations have already committed themselves to playing active roles in conflict prevention and resolution, and that they have already made certain achievements in this area.

2. On the basis of their evaluation that subregional organizations are currently building legal and institutional arrangements to increase their conflict prevention and resolution capacities, participants reached the consensus that further efforts should be made; specifically, arrangements relevant to effective communication which would lead to mutual trust among member States, adjustments to their respective interests, the decision-making process of the organizations, and their methods of engagement, among others.

3. Participants acknowledged that subregional organizations should pay attention to constructing their own early warning systems, and also that the United Nations, OAU and subregional organizations should make concerted efforts to build an integrated and functional three-tier early warning system. Recalling some delayed responses by the international community in dealing with African conflicts in the 1990s, participants, being aware of the need for early response and action, emphasized the importance of efforts in bridging the time lag between early warning and early response.

4. Participants expressed support for the efforts by subregional organizations to tackle security problems such as the proliferation of small arms, trafficking in illegal goods, and environmental problems through regional programmes.

5. Participants shared the view that subregional organizations can play a significant role in the post-conflict stage, such as monitoring a ceasefire, or disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. There was agreement among participants that the accumulation and dispersal of small arms, which is one of the most significant causes of the expansion and prolonging of regional conflicts, be addressed with some urgency. A consensus was reached that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) declaration of a moratorium on light weapons should be appreciated as a significant step, and similar practices should be urgently introduced in other African regions.

6. Additionally, a consensus was reached that further discussion is welcomed on the issue whether regional or subregional organizations would be placed at the focal point, where appropriate, as the main recipient of international assistance. In relation to this, the leading role of OAU was recognized, as well as the need to support efforts to enable OAU to work in tandem with subregional organizations.

7. While each subregional organization is surrounded by different circumstances, there are many commonalities that subregional organizations share. Assuming that the exchange of past experiences between subregional organizations would be mutually beneficial, the promotion of such mutual exchange and other cooperative activities should also be given consideration.

4. Roles and functions of non-governmental organizations and need for further participation

1. There is great potential for NGOs to play important roles in conflict prevention and resolution in Africa where most conflicts are intra-State by nature, as well as in post-conflict peace-building. Participants recognized the growing expectation by the international community of the roles of NGOs. Under such circumstances, where principles of non-interference in internal affairs and territorial integrity based on national sovereignty might obstruct the international community from engaging in conflict prevention and resolution, significant functions of NGOs were widely recognized among participants, and can be outlined as follows. First, NGOs can shape international opinion by notifying the international community about problematic policies or actions practised by conflicting parties. Second, NGOs have the potential for early warning because of their close contact with local populations through their various

activities at the grass-roots level. Third, NGOs can gain access to almost all parties concerned, including not only Governments but even anti-government forces. Fourth, NGOs in their capacity as a neutral and impartial third party have great potential in promoting mutual understanding and reconciliation between conflicting parties.

2. Based on the functions outlined above, concrete roles for NGOs in conflict prevention and resolution can be identified as follows; these roles may be expressed as an outreach function supplementing "track one" processes which are pursued by official organs such as international organizations and/or individual Governments:

(a) Disseminating early warning signals;

(b) Practising mediation and conciliation;

(c) Forming international opinion;

(d) Conducting humanitarian relief activities;

(e) Dealing with some post-conflict activities relating to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (disarmament of small arms and anti-personnel mines, demobilization, and the reintegration of former combatants into civilian life);

(f) Increasing mutual understanding between conflicting parties;

(g) Assisting democratization (for example, the monitoring of elections).

3. Participants shared the view that NGOs can contribute, with the capacity of early warning, to the early warning systems already constructed or in the process of construction by the United Nations, OAU and subregional organizations.

4. Moreover, it was agreed among participants that in order to adequately cope with problems such as the duplication of activities and feelings of rivalry among respective NGOs, certain measures including networking among NGOs and/or some type of a code of conduct for NGOs should be considered.

5. Additionally, agreement was reached among participants on the need to ensure the safety of NGO staff operating in both conflict areas and neighbouring areas. A consensus was further reached that a code of conduct should be elaborated for NGOs to be applied when making contact with armed militias or withdrawing from conflict areas in crisis situations.

6. It was also pointed out that there is a strategic advantage in some common funding appeals by NGOs, regional organizations and subregional organizations for their capacity-building in conflict prevention and resolution.

5. Request to the Japanese Government

1. Deep appreciation was expressed by participants invited to this symposium which was co-sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Institute for International Policy Studies, and also an expectation was expressed that this kind of symposium would be held again in the years to come.

2. Participants further expressed their expectation that the Japanese Government, which is hosting the Kyushu-Okinawa Summit this coming summer, will become more involved with conflict prevention and resolution in Africa.